

Moving from Scrum to Scrumban

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For over three years, Dynanet has been delivering award-winning software by leveraging lessons learned from embracing Scrum. Mike McEwen, Dynanet's Certified Scrum Master, covers the benefits and improved results from moving to a Scrumban environment. Haven't heard of Scrumban? Read more to see if it is right for your agency or company.

Scrumban, a word mentioned a lot in agile discussions these days, is a hybrid of two frameworks rooted in lean engineering: Scrum and Kanban. Scrum promotes iterative development by assigning tasks to one or more time-boxed sprints. At the beginning of the sprint, the team commits to whatever it will accomplish by the end of the sprint. In contrast, Kanban teams continually pull work requests from the backlog when needed (i.e., when they finish other higher priority work). Kanban teams also carefully control their Work In Progress (WIP) to encourage focus and minimize multitasking versus Scrum, which might assign multiple tasks to team members in any given sprint. Scrumban typically means following Scrum while assigning and monitoring work using Kanban techniques. By adopting Kanban principles, Scrum software development teams can improve visibility and control of WIP, increase velocity, and increase team morale.

In its simplest form, Scrumban means just adding some columns to the Scrum board. For example, if your Scrum board has columns labeled **To-Do**, **In-Progress**, and **Done**, you might replace the **In-Progress** column with three new ones for **Development**, **Ready For Testing**, and **Ready for Stakeholder Review**. Items (seen as tickets, cards, or sticky notes) appearing in the **Ready For Testing** and **Ready for Stakeholder Review** columns signal specialists for those workflow states (e.g., testers and business analysts) to start their part of the user stories. Adding columns to the Scrum board can yield greater insights into the performance of the team by making workflow and status more visible.

Here are some other reasons to incorporate more Kanban into your Scrum:

- **Special Teams Are Bottlenecks.** If tasks often get stuck in-progress after development is done, adding new workflow states (i.e., columns) enables everyone to see the status of work assigned to specialists like testers or designers. Kanban's emphasis on workflow control can also help prevent those specialists from becoming overwhelmed, pressured, and discouraged.
- **Boring or Redundant Daily Scrums.** If things are progressing well during a sprint, the daily standup meetings may become just a rehash of news already available in your information radiators or Scrum management tool. Instead, try adding a discussion of backlog items to the daily agenda to prepare them for development. Specifically, you want to ensure that each item meets your definition of ready (e.g., is prioritized and estimated). Taking a few minutes every day to implement Kanban's continual backlog grooming can reenergize your daily meetings!
- **Team Members Not Sure What To Do Next.** Kanban's "pull on-demand" can avoid idle team members and increase velocity by keeping backlog items ready for team members who finish their sprint commitments early. By taking on "stretch tickets," the team maintains its cadence, adds customer value, and increases velocity.
- **Most of Your Work is Maintaining Rather Than Enhancing.** Kanban is a better fit for service desk and maintenance operations, which may not fit easily into Scrum's sprint framework. If most of your releases are bug fixes, refactoring, and small improvements, moving to Scrumban or Kanban altogether may make your teams more responsive in an environment with dynamic priorities.

As your Scrum teams mature and become better integrated with the stakeholder or sponsoring organization, they may want to incorporate even more Kanban. For example, instead of defining the entire sprint during a formal planning meeting up front, teams might just perform continuous backlog refinement and pull work into their queues as they complete work requests. This gives stakeholders more opportunities for redirecting the team as priorities change. Even if you keep sprint planning sessions, Kanban should allow you to complete them quickly. And as the teams achieve a consistent velocity, it may not make sense to spend time reviewing burndown or burnup charts, which just track completion of work. Instead, focus on improving velocity, which measures the team's throughput of completed backlog items, i.e., their value stream. As a mature Scrumban team optimizes its planning and development workflow, it may also want to add a workflow state for analysis to cover user story development. Ultimately, blending principles from Scrum and Kanban enables your teams to deliver features faster to end-users and realize a feature-on-demand, DevOps paradigm.

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